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ABSTRACT

Despite public discourse affirming the importance of maintaining the Navajo language and despite extensive language maintenance efforts by Navajo schools, the Navajo people are experiencing a rapid shift from Navajo to English. This book draws on fieldwork conducted in the small community of Tsaile, on the Navajo Reservation in northeastern Arizona, and focuses on an ideological component in this language shift. Diverse and contradictory ideologies held by Navajo people about their subordination to the dominant American society have led to language and cultural choices and behaviors that contribute to this language situation and that will continue to erode the language. Language and cultural attitudes are organized around a dichotomy that represents the Navajos and the United States as essentialized opposites. The pervasive existence and consequences of the friction between the ideological positions represented by this dichotomy are substantiated through analysis of the contexts of language use by Navajos in their contemporary institutions, especially schools. The book suggests that the traditional Navajo paradigm valuing harmony and balance offers a way to acknowledge the conflicts and contradictions of life and to create a true and equal bilingualism/biculturalism. (Contains approximately 100 references.) (SV)

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